

September 5, 2017

EJ Outreach:

The EPA hosted a call with key Environmental Justice (EJ) contacts in Texas and Louisiana on September 5, 2017. The purpose of the call was to reach out to EJ contacts to discuss and listen to community environmental concerns in the areas impacted by Hurricane Harvey. Today's call established an EJ Network and EPA will convene weekly calls to keep the Network abreast of EJ related environmental concerns associated with the current emergency situation. Community members representing Beaumont, Port Arthur, Houston, Manchester, Corpus Christi, Lake Charles and Colonias were on the call. Concerns/feedback voiced by the EJ Network include the following:

Requests

- Make sampling equipment available for citizens to use. For example, buckets for air sampling.
- Reach colonias north of Houston, tri-county area (Harris, Montgomery, Liberty) to ensure they are safe
- Inform what air monitors are operating and where in the general Houston area
- Place fulltime EJ staff/boots on the ground to work closely with community residents; residents feel intimidated by industry officials as residents seek to know how their safety needs are being met because of environmental discharges in the environment close to homes
- Inform on how to best reach TCEQ for timely feedback, including TCEQ efforts in re-establishing air monitoring to cover more areas where air emissions/safety are serious concerns
- Report monitoring data results to community in timely manner including air and water sampling data
- Assessment and contamination reports from Louisiana regulatory agencies regarding western areas of Louisiana affected by flooding
- Communication strategy involving regular meetings with EJ stakeholders providing updates that people can understand
- Provide timely information by all local and federal agencies; residents don't clearly know who and where to go for help

General:

- Information and warnings are not reaching the masses in both Texas and Louisiana – lack of appropriate risk communication to the public
- Gas shortage has hindered recovery efforts
- More emphasis seems to be placed on industry welfare rather than communities
- Need for bilingual staff (Spanish, Vietnamese etc.) to assist with emergency response effort including community town halls
- Coastal parishes seemly are being neglected in the aftermath. There are concerns regarding contamination, storage of gas and brine, and lots of flooding

- Concern about lack of TCEQ presence in some areas of Houston
- Evacuation zones should be set by authorities; not industry (used Crosby example)
- Professional Fire Fighters, not volunteer fire fighters should be servicing emergency situations for people to feel confident about their safety

Manchester:

- Manchester Community needs help in air monitoring and water testing
- Poor air quality, particularly high levels of benzene in Manchester
 - How soon air quality data can be shared and utilized?
- Air Alliance offered to provide their readings from their air monitoring to TEJAS advocacy group
- Concern voiced about chemical smells in Manchester and other areas
- LEAN is sending re-entry supplies to TEJAS

Colonias (Houston and Corpus Christi areas):

- Concern over the spread of mosquitoes and the lack of electrical power for septic tanks and wells
- Worried about flooding causing arsenic and uranium to leach from the groundwater.

Baytown

- Baytown has several low-income neighborhoods in which their needs are not being addressed; Red Cross or FEMA have not reached this area.
 - Mosquitos are present in Baytown and need to be addressed
 - Industries and local fire volunteer fire departments in Baytown are setting evacuation measures- not the EPA or state agency
 - Question if sediment sludge is being tested in Baytown

Barret Station

African American town established by freed slaves were not informed or evacuated during the Arkema plant fire.

Louisiana

- No testing done on contaminated sludge and community has no access to industry reports on release
- St. James and St. John the Baptist Parishes flooded

Misc:

- Interaction with School Boards; making sure mold is not present in schools and that outside conditions are safe.
- Informed call participants that Harris County has been taking the lead on communication and data sheltering procedures
- Informed participants that EPA is working on accessing Superfund sites